

TYLER, JOHN

DRAWER

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# Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

John Tyler

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

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# JOHN TYLER

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Address of  
**Hon. Claude G. Bowers**  
of New York

at the  
**Unveiling of the Bust of President Tyler**  
**in the State Capitol, Richmond, Va.**  
**June 16, 1931**

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**Printed in the Congressional Record**  
**June 13, 1933**

by request of  
**Hon. Harry Flood Byrd**  
of Virginia

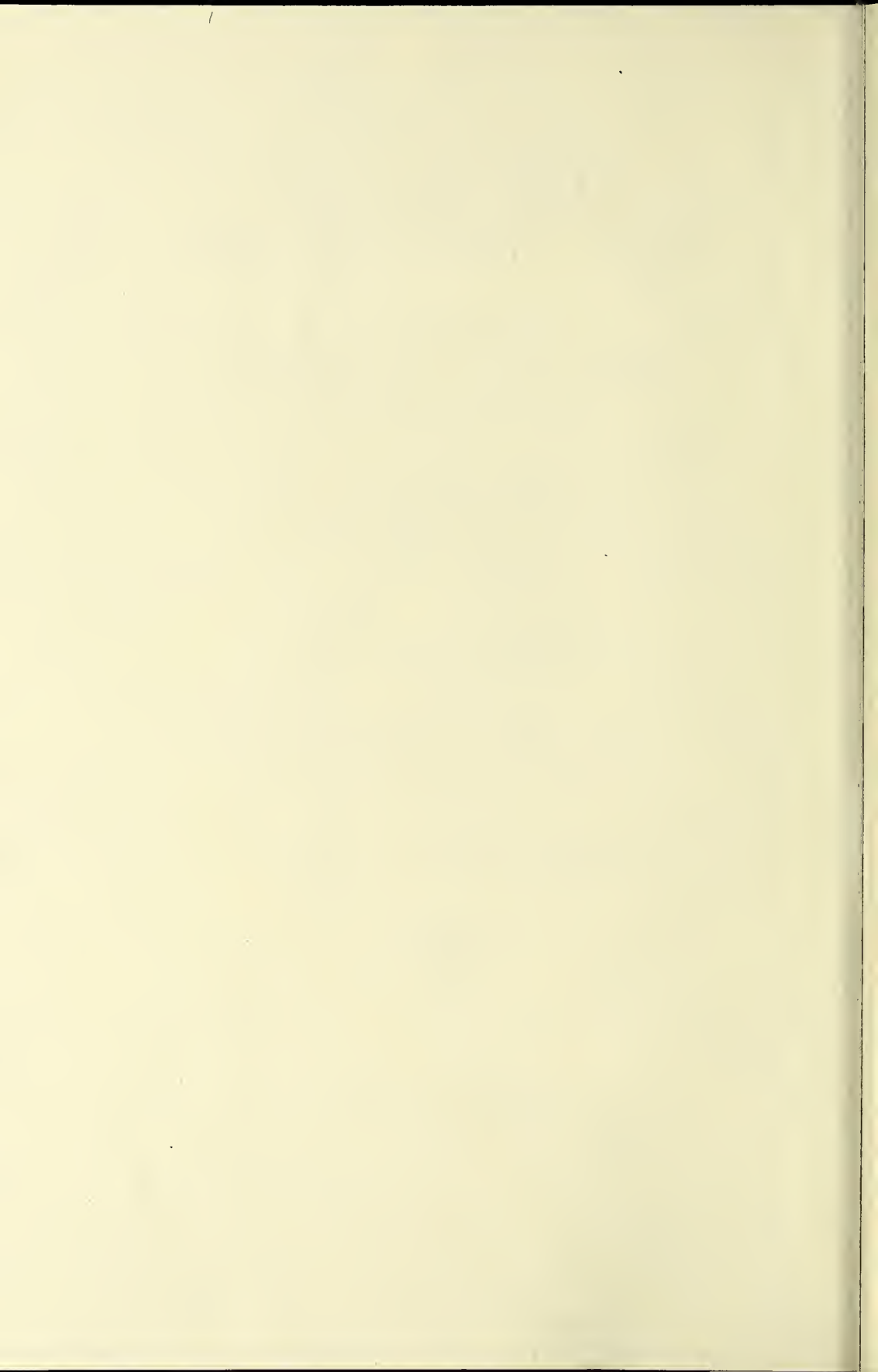
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ADDRESS  
OF  
HON. CLAUDE G. BOWERS

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Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, on June 16, 1931, the Honorable Claude G. Bowers, of New York, now ambassador of the United States to Spain, delivered a brilliant and, from an historical standpoint, a most interesting address on John Tyler, the occasion being the unveiling of a bust of President Tyler in the State Capitol at Richmond, Va. I think the address is of such merit that, although it was delivered sometime ago, it should be preserved in the volumes of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, and I ask unanimous consent that it may be printed in the Appendix.

There being no objection, the address was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

A little more than a decade before the Revolution, two ardent Virginia youths at William and Mary might have been seen almost any evening with their heads together in study. They were kindred spirits in their love of liberty and of the inalienable rights of man. Together, with flaming cheeks, they had listened in the Virginia convention to the immortal eloquence of Patrick Henry. One was to become the greatest American political philosopher and the father of American democracy, and the other, one of his ablest and most trusted lieutenants, and the father of a future President whose bust we unvail today.

It was in the year that Jefferson and Madison, riding leisurely through New England, planned the organization of resistance to the domination of the Hamiltonians that John Tyler, to whom we pay tribute here today, was born. Reared in an atmosphere of culture and meditation, he was a precocious youth. He steeped himself in history, and thus found the background for his political convictions; in poetry, and thus cultivated the imagination and the gift of phrasing that was to give a literary flavor to his eloquence. The gentility of his manner was inherent, an inheritance of his blood, a reflection of his home. When at the age of 17 he finished his course at Williamsburg, he possessed already the social charm, the suavity, and urbanity of a gentleman of the world. But his education was by no means confined to the curriculum of the college. From earliest childhood he had come under the influence of the remarkable man who was his father. The relations of Chatham and his brilliant son were not more influential in the burnishing of the genius of the younger Pitt than were those of Judge Tyler and the future President. By voice and pen the elder man impressed upon the scion of his house the fundamentals of the faith of Thomas Jefferson. There came a day when the ardent youth was to meet the great philosopher of his faith at his father's table, to come under the fascination of his personality, and to listen to an intimate political conversation he was to treasure always in his mind.

Thus, on the very threshold of his life, we find him firmly anchored to his creed in politics. He believed that men are the

masters and not the slaves of government, that constitutions are the contracts binding on those in power, that States are entities with sovereign rights, that power should be diffused among the people and not centralized in some capital remote, that there are certain inalienable rights of men that governments dare not question, that any political action based on privilege is a usurpation and a crime, and that the function of government is to assure the liberties of the people and to operate for the happiness of mankind. This was his political faith to which he clung tenaciously from the hour, when scarcely more than a boy, he entered public life, until he laid his burdens down with death.

Since we are concerned primarily with his public life, it is interesting to glance at the equipment which was to make him the powerful and persuasive champion of any cause that he espoused. With strength, he had a winning personality which invited confidence. He was easy, graceful, and appealing; his urbanity drew men to him, and his dignity, without pose, saved him from the pawing of vulgarity. His voice in conference and conversation was ingratiating, and his features were lighted with the kindness of true gentility. But nothing contributed more to the success of his leadership than his Jeffersonian art in the management of men. He was too much the psychologist arbitrarily to give orders. He was a genius in the art of suggestion. He had the subtlety to insinuate his own thoughts into the minds of his conferees, and he was a master in the art of permitting himself to be persuaded to the acceptance of his own ideas and plans. And along with these, he had other qualities, his adamant honesty and a courage that never in the stormiest moments of his life flinched or faltered under fire.

But he had another implement in his armory that made him a powerful factor in the polemics of his time—a natural gift of eloquence that moved men to his will. He realized the concept of logic on fire, and there was grace and beauty in the flames. Out from a well-stored mind he spoke with a fluency that never faltered, for in his callow days in this very room, like Charles James Fox in the House of Commons, he had spoken with frequency in the perfecting of his art. He made his art so much an art that the artistry was not in evidence. Its cultivation was confined to the literary phrase, and he had trained his taste by constant communion with the greatest masters of poetry and prose. In delivery he had but to give nature rein, for nature had given him a dramatic sense, imagination, a capacity for righteous wrath, and a silvery voice that was an instrument of music.

Thus we have the motivating principles of his life; and the equipment with which, at the age of 21, this young man, mature beyond his years, entered the House of Delegates, and sat within these walls. He entered when we were challenging the imperial power of England in the second war, and when the light from our burning Capitol illumined darkly the treason of the political foes of the administration, young Tyler's voice and vote were in support of Madison, and day by day his eloquence was heard urging a vigorous prosecution of the war. The revolutionary fire of his father tipped his tongue.

Here, too, he fought the battles of Jeffersonian democracy against the bank, and laid down the principle in support of which in later life he was to rise to an heroic stature—that Senators in a representative government are but the servants and never the sovereign of the people they represent. Returned five times with practical unanimity, he was a veteran already at 26 when he was made a member of the Executive Council and elected to the Federal House of Representatives.

Thus he entered the national arena a seasoned debater, a persuasive orator, his principles set in granite, and he moved with easy grace and with consent to a commanding position among his colleagues. Here, perhaps, that which was most significant of his prescience and genius as a leader, was his opposi-

tion to the Missouri Compromise. With Calhoun, that giant whose philosophic intellect has seldom been approached in all our history, supporting the measure, the voice of the Virginia youth of 28 was courageously raised against it. And his, not Calhoun's, was the voice of prophecy. Now statesmanship is the gift of seeing into day after tomorrow. It was not the immediate purpose of the compromise that he opposed; it was the accompanying concession of the constitutional right of Congress to legislate on slavery in the territories. Though not yet 30, he foresaw what others failed to see—that with the admission of the principle of congressional interference, the door was opened for the continuing agitation that ultimately would endanger the solidarity of the Union. He did not propose that the door should be opened with his consent; he raised his voice in prophetic warning, and hastening events would soon vindicate his judgment and prove his statesmanship.

With shattered health, he retired to private life at the age of 30, only to be called by the mandate of the people at 35 to the gubernatorial honors of this historic Commonwealth; and, brief though his tenure was, his instinct for constructive action served his people well. He found that the mountains raised a barrier between the people of the East and West; his was the dream to circumvent the mountains and thus make for the greater spiritual solidarity of Virginia. Under the pressure and inspiration of his leadership the sections were closer knit by the canals and roads he built.

But to me, more important than his plan for the material improvement of Virginia, was his dream of extending the blessings of education to every son and daughter of the soil through the creation of a system of public schools. Jefferson, long before him, had had this dream and failed, and Tyler carried on and failed, but it was from the seed sown and tended by the Jeffersons and Tylers that ultimately was to spring the great public-school system of Virginia.

Thus when Tyler entered the Senate at the age of 37 he was definitely anchored to a political philosophy and adequately trained for statesmanship of a high order. It was the Senate's golden age, comparable to that of the British Parliament in the days of Pitt and Fox, of Burke and Sheridan, and destined to give to literature some of the greatest orations of all times, to engage in gladiatorial combats of the intellect never before approached on this side of the sea, and to deal with subjects that went to the very foundations of our governmental system. And into this glorious company and into this portentous day stepped John Tyler, instantly to take high rank among the acknowledged leaders of that body.

Unhappily we can only sketchily survey the part he played and touch upon the more significant events. With economic issues and the slavery agitation driving a wedge between the sections, the sensitive political consciousness of Tyler caught afar off the ominous footbeats of marching men. He loved Virginia; his forbears from the days of the cavalier had helped direct its destiny and men of his blood were sleeping in its soil; but no man ever loved the Union conceived by the fathers more tenderly or truly. No statesman of his time dedicated his genius for conciliation more completely to the reconciliation of the sections through the healing processes of the legislation of compromise.

Scarcely had he taken his seat when the abominable Tariff Act of 1828 was forced upon the statutes. It was a tax on the agriculturists of the South to increase the profits of the industrialists of the North through the violation of economic laws. Even then, though few knew it, the irrepressible conflict was at hand. In his rural home at the foot of the Blue Ridge, Calhoun was meditating his doctrine of nullification. The sizzling pens of the Rhetts were preaching resistance in the press. To paraphrase Lord Churchill's famous sentence, hot-headed devotees of

southern interest, giving more heat than light, were crying that "South Carolina will fight and South Carolina will be right." Emissaries of that great Commonwealth were traversing the South seeking cooperation in resistance; youth was toying nervously with its muskets; secret agents of the grim old man in the White House were beating a pathway to and from his door; and then—the nullification proclamation; and then—the Force bill.

Tyler had met the danger on the threshold and had fought the tariff of 1828 with all his zeal. He saw beyond the economic issue to the danger to the Union. The wisest, soundest, most prophetic speech against that measure of iniquity was that of Tyler, and Madison and John Marshall, divided in political affiliation, joined in lavish praise of the tone, the temper, and the content of the Tyler speech. You will search the records of Congress in vain for a more persuasive and pathetic appeal to the better angels of our nature. Others were combatants in the fight; almost alone, John Tyler plead for peace through justice. But the bill was passed, and the storm clouds gathered, and there were rumblings on the far horizon; and then nullification—and the Force bill.

Now, John Tyler had no sympathy with nullification. "Let government be just", he said, "and nullification has no food on which to exist." But he had no sympathy with the Force bill. "It sweeps away", he said, "all the barriers of the Constitution." He had no faith in the unselfish patriotism of the beneficiaries of the Tariff Act. "The manufacturers will fight", he said, "rather than resign their profits."

And then, in the midst of the preparation for armed action, there came a pause. When at the instance of Virginia, South Carolina suspended the operation of her nullification act to give time for mediation, John Tyler stepped into the breach. Quietly he set about his task. The material was all before him. Here was the Force bill which ultimately meant war; here was nullification which meant the Force bill; and here was the tariff that meant nullification. Reduce the tariff, and nullification would die out, and the Force bill could be abandoned.

He looked about the Chamber for the human elements with which he had to work. There was Henry Clay, whose autocratic and domineering ways had done so much to force the tariff act upon the statutes, and there was Calhoun, whose extreme opposition had brought the crisis on. Could these two men be brought together in a spirit of conciliation, by appeals to their patriotism, the situation might be saved. Already in a speech Tyler had outlined the basis of a compromise. He proposed that if the manufacturers would agree to reduce the tariff to a revenue basis, there should be a gradual reduction to prevent the disorganization of their industries. That was the compromise of 1833, and John Tyler was its father.

But would Clay agree to the reduction or Calhoun consent to the delay? Tyler turned to them—these men who momentarily were not on speaking terms. Clay quailed a moment at the anticipated fury of the manufacturers, but only for a moment. How simply Tyler has told the story: "I appealed to his patriotism. No one ever did so in vain." And then it was Tyler who persuaded Clay and Calhoun to a meeting. And with what Spartan brevity does he record the event, "They met, consulted, agreed."

And thus it was, when the very foundations of the Union shook, that Henry Clay arose to offer as the compromise of 1833 the very proposition Tyler previously had urged upon the Senate floor. The scene deserves the memorialization of a canvas. As Clay announced the compromise he turned toward Tyler, and, meeting in mid-Chamber, the two men clasped hands.

These two men were soon to become inveterate foes, and Tyler was to suffer through the other's acts. But in the twilight of his days, when Clay was dead and in this city a monument to his

memory was raised, John Tyler journeyed hither to pay tribute to his foe, to recall the scene that day in the Senate Chamber, and to say, "It is the clasp of that hand that has brought me here today." I know of nothing finer or nobler in the story of American politics. It mattered not to Tyler that his, the essential part, had been ignored by history, that all the credit might go to Clay. He was big enough to—

"Take the cash and let the credit go  
Nor heed the rumble of a distant drum."

It was enough to him that in a grave crisis in his country's history he had stepped into the breach when others faltered and given the Union a new lease on life.

This was the supreme service of his senatorial career, but nothing in that career became him better than his manner of leaving it. He had fought for Jackson against the rechartering of the national bank; for Jackson's fight was in accordance with the fundamentals of his faith. He broke with Jackson on the removal of the deposits—and this was consistent with that faith as well. He conceived the removal an act of executive usurpation creating a precedent for a dangerous concentration of power, and he voted to spread a censure of the act upon the record. And when Virginia instructed him to vote to expunge the censure, he rose to heroic heights of manhood.

Throughout his life he had committed himself to the right of a constituency to instruct a representative, and now that principle pressed upon him. He did not hesitate. The people he represented had instructed him to vote against the dictates of his conscience. He could not vote against his conscience; he would not act against the instructions of his people; and thus, putting aside the cynical importunities of partisans, and scorning recourse to the sophistries of self-deception, he tendered his resignation and filed out of the Senate Chamber in the proud company of his self-respect. I know of nothing so Cato-like in the austerity of its integrity as this act which gave new dignity to public station. The situation he confronted was the acid test of true greatness of mind and soul, and John Tyler stood the test.

The 4 years that intervened between his resignation and his return to the national arena were crowded with political events. The Whigs, with whom he was affiliated, were maneuvering for position. The seed of disintegration was in that party's cradle, for it was an incongruous combination of inconsistent and utterly irreconcilable elements. And as the Vice Presidential nominee of this hodge-podge party, John Tyler was elected in 1840, and almost immediately reached the Presidency through the death of Harrison.

Partisan historians have accused the Tyler of the Presidency with disloyalty to the Whigs—and this is false. He had made no compromise with his conscience for the nomination. He had yielded not one jot of his opposition to the protective-tariff policy; and in the very heat of the campaign he had reiterated his uncompromising hostility to the national bank. And did the Whigs then repudiate his leadership? No; they acclaimed his policy the platform of the party on which they appealed to the electorate of the Union. Throughout the campaign of 1840 not one Whig statesman proposed the abandonment of the tariff compromise of 1833; not one Whig leader so much as hinted of a plan for the restoration of the bank.

Ah, but do they say that there was no positive declaration to the contrary? The records are against them. Throughout the campaign the Whig press insisted with reiterated emphasis that the tariff and the bank were no longer issues—that they were dead. The Whigs of the Legislature of Virginia formally proclaimed the promise and the pledge that their victory at the polls would not be followed by an attempt to increase the tariff or to recharter the

bank. The Whig campaign was made upon the principles of John Tyler as its platform; and had the party deviated one hair's breadth from him on fundamental principles he would have flung the nomination back into its lap.

And now the victory is won, and now Harrison, with the laurel wreath of triumph fresh upon him, lies in the White House, dead; and now John Tyler succeeds to the Presidency. Now the Whigs, with a brazen effrontery unparalleled in American history, throw off the mask of hypocrisy and prepare to push the very policies they themselves renounced when seeking the suffrage of the people—and now John Tyler confronts them and dismays them with the spectacle of an honest statesman who refuses to be a party to the intolerable treachery.

Picture to yourself the isolation of his position. He had incurred the hostility of the Democrats by his opposition to Jackson, and he challenges now the hatred of the Whigs by his fidelity to the pledge and principles on which he was elected.

The first to reach the Presidency through succession, they seek to minimize his power and belittle his position, and by meeting them with a stern and dignified assertion of his constitutional status he rendered an immeasurable service to the Republic.

But meanwhile, with much waving of banners, his party is moving toward the deliberate betrayal of its pledge under the hypnotic influence of the incomparable Clay. Thus Tyler received his ultimatum—the surrender of his principles or the repudiation of his party. Conscious of the seriousness of the situation, he moved with a statesman's instinct for reasonable conciliation and proposed a compromise consistent with his constitutional objections to the bank, the establishment of a District bank in Washington with branches in the States, provided the States gave consent. It was a statesman's proffer of peace; and brushing it aside, Clay sought the creation of another bank like that which the people, with reason, had destroyed. Then it was that John Tyler proved his mettle by meeting the impudent betrayal with a vigorous veto, and Clay turned loose upon him the dogs of war. In Whig communities he was burned in effigy and even threatened with assassination.

Before the storm fanned by the bellows of the repudiated bank John Tyler stood erect, serene in the consciousness of duty done; and when another bank bill equally offensive was enacted he killed it with a veto once again. The Cabinet, bowing to the will of Clay, filed out; all but Webster, who refused to stoop.

Once more Tyler concentrated his constructive mind upon finance, and eventually evolved his exchequer system, pronounced by Webster at Faneuil Hall, "the most beneficial institution, the Constitution alone excepted", to the credit of American statesmanship. But partisanship prevailed; the Whigs refused the measure; and thus through the remainder of his administration John Tyler was the custodian of the Nation's money, and in the end he turned it over without the misplacement of a single cent. The record of Tyler on finance was that of honesty and political integrity, of constructive capacity and conciliation, as far as honor went; it was as a shaft of wholesome light in a darkened room.

Again they tested his honor with a tariff measure obnoxious to his conscience, and they met his instant veto with personal abuse and the menace of impeachment; and he stood in the storm again unbowed, serene, and in the end prevailed. To find another President as dignified and unswerving in the face of foul abuse, one must come down to the days of Andrew Johnson.

But not always did partisanship and faction intervene to thwart him in his domestic policies; and, free from that, his record as administrator was one of quick decision, forceful action, and a conciliating tact. Thus he turned to the Seminole war in Florida that 7 years of fighting had failed to end; he ended it with victory in a few scant months and the red men moved

toward the sunset and the white settlers moved in to redeem the waste places to the purposes of men. Thus he faced the unprecedented challenge of the Dorr Rebellion in Rhode Island; and it dissipated before the disclosure of his clear intent to put down insurrection, even though the men in arms were demanding what he himself conceived to be their inalienable rights. He put the insurrection down without the firing of a shot, without the movement of a soldier, without inflicting a solitary wound to the principle of State rights. Unhampered by factious opposition, he met every domestic issue with rare executive ability.

But even so the prospect brightens when we turn to international affairs. In his contracts with the diplomatic corps he was singularly happy; for his elegance of manner, his suavity, and old-world courtesy gave a charm to his diplomatic conversations. He was by nature a conciliator. He had a genius for negotiations. He had the power, no matter how hot his blood, of keeping his head cool. And seldom has such qualities been so imperatively needed as when he entered upon his Presidency. The clouds on the international horizon were low and threatening and our relations with England were dangerously impaired. The controversy over the northern boundary, continuing through six administrations, had finally found Maine and New Brunswick facing each other, armed, across the border. The incident of the *Caroline* was pressing for solution, and diplomacy had reached an impasse; and the arrest of a British subject for murder in that connection was threatening to break the diplomatic relations of the English-speaking nations. The searching of American vessels by British cruisers, under the pretext of suppressing the slave trade, had brought on an acrimonious debate. It was under these delicate conditions that Lord Ashburton, a bluff and honest Britisher, sacrificed the serenity of his retirement from public life, at the summons of patriotism and humanity, to undertake, in Washington, the negotiation of a general treaty of amity. No finer figure has appeared in such a cause upon our shores.

We cannot enter into the details of the famous Webster-Ashburton Treaty. Suffice it to say that it measurably succeeded in the settlement of all disputes and probably prevented another war. We know the story of the negotiations over the wine and walnuts in the exchange of dinners between Webster and Ashburton in the houses in LaFayette Square; we know the difficulties that constantly threatened rupture; we know that in the deadly miasmic heat of a Washington summer, the negotiators, frequently on edge, and worn to utter exhaustion, were more than once upon the point of breaking off. All honor to the part then played by Daniel Webster, but it was John Tyler who saved the situation more than once by his persuasive tact. Throughout the negotiations he seemingly stood aloof, confiding in his minister, but not a move was made by Webster without a consultation with his chief. His was the decisive voice in every instance. It was in the conferences of that summer's heat that these two men acquired that admiration for each other's qualities which persisted through their lives.

One scene from the drama of those negotiations—one not dissimilar to others. In the determination of the boundary line the two ministers have apparently reached the end of their concessions. The accumulating irritations of the prolonged debate have seemingly made the prospects hopeless. The negotiators are sulking in their tents. The aged Ashburton, sweltering and sickening in the unaccustomed humidity and heat, is ready to abandon further efforts and return to England.

And now John Tyler steps into the breach. He invites the British diplomat to a conversation. Instead of the scowling, fighting face of the irritated Webster, he looks into the serene and sympathetic countenance of Tyler. The atmosphere of the controversy is missing now. Nowhere about is to be seen the paraphernalia

of combat. And he listens to a kindly, soothing human being making a moving human appeal. He hears an appeal that ignores diplomacy and goes directly to the heart of the generous old man who required no sensational diplomatic triumph to serve the purposes of personal ambition. He hears a reminder that upon the amicable solution of the pressing problems may rest the peace of people bound together by a common language, a common literature, and common traditions of freedom. And he hears the direct appeal to him, "If you cannot settle them, what man in England can?" Before that tactful and almost tender appeal the old man melts. "Well, well, Mr. President", he splutters, "well, well, we must try again." One need not detract one iota from the claims of the two negotiators to conclude that but for the conciliatory genius, the calming serenity, and the pervasive humanity of John Tyler these negotiations might have failed and war have come.

The foreign policy of John Tyler was strong as dignity and conciliatory as humanity. He erased from the agenda of controversy some of the most complicated problems of his time. He had strength without bluster, firmness without stubbornness, and patriotism without chauvinism. History has conceded his triumphs in the field of international relations. The same qualities that made him the conciliator of the Senate made him the peace-maker of the English-speaking peoples at a critical period of their relations.

And now we reach the supreme triumph of his administration. For many years the most prescient statesmen had foreseen the need of the imperial territory of Texas properly to round out the Nation's destiny. Adams had bartered for it and failed. Jackson had increased the offer of many fold and failed. Meanwhile the hardy race of American pioneers in Texas had risen in revolt, and on the bloody field of San Jacinto successfully had challenged the authority of Mexico and proclaimed their independence. With its charter of independence in its hand, signed by the nations of the world, it had offered annexation to Van Buren, who preferred to await the proof of its ability to withstand the assault of Mexico. Five years of testing had intervened before the Presidency of John Tyler, and despite sporadic dashes of outlaws from across the border to plunder, to murder, and to burn, there stood Texas, unshaken and unshakable in her independence, a sovereign nation, master of her destiny.

Within 6 months of his accession John Tyler planned to make the acquisition of Texas a major accomplishment of his administration. He saw in Texas the rounding out of our national destiny; he saw an empire of immeasurable potentialities in wealth and power eager for annexation; and, noting her struggles against marauders, her credit failing, he foresaw the danger of intrigue from England or from France. Within 6 months he had urged the project of annexation by treaty upon Webster in a historic letter. But conditions were not then ripe. The Minister of Texas was in our capital pleading for annexation; but we had private claims pending against the Government of Mexico, and we had to wait on that. There were factions in the Senate which would pass upon the treaty, and the unification of these forces had to be managed with finesse; and we had to wait on that. And while we waited, England, with fifty millions loaned in Mexico, was casting a threatening shadow on the scene; for when we seemed to spurn the Texas plea to take an empire for the asking, she turned a receptive ear to the whisperings of the diplomacy of Britain. The Abolitionists were on the war path now, and soon Lord Brougham, thundering in Parliament against slavery, would be expatiating glowingly upon the material advantages of the rich domain. The hour had struck for action; delay was dangerous.

Webster had now departed, and Tyler instructed Upshur, his successor, to offer a treaty of annexation to the Texas minister

under the seal of secrecy. It was none too soon. Already Houston, the Texas President, was under the spell of England, and Texas was involved in the intrigue. Already the hardy American pioneers in Texas, in ignorance of the maneuvering behind the scenes and discouraged by our seeming indifference to the plea for annexation, were despairing of relief from us; and then, just then, a ringing message to the Congress from John Tyler denouncing the Mexican intermeddling in Texas and demanding that it cease. The people of Texas heard and understood and cheered; the British intrigue was undermined and wrecked.

Meanwhile Upshur was canvassing the Senate for a constitutional majority for the treaty, finding ways he hoped would prevent the raising of a party issue, drawing men together on the higher grounds of patriotism. And out from his seclusion at the Hermitage Andrew Jackson stepped to the side of Tyler; the Jacksonians fell in line behind their leader; and as Fremont, the son-in-law of Benton, turned with the President's commission toward the Oregon trail Old Bullion whirled into the administration camp on Texas. And then tragedy intervened with the death of Upshur.

Out from his retirement at the foot of Blue Ridge, Calhoun, now with some misgivings, was summoned to the portfolio of State. Under the once prevalent and now discredited abolitionist misinterpretation of history Calhoun was credited with the move for Texas. Absurd assumption! The treaty was completed before Calhoun took office, the negotiations were over, and he was to contribute nothing of material importance. He had opposed the pressing of the project in a letter still preserved in the archives of the State Department, and after the event was consummated he frankly avowed his remonstrance at the time in a public speech.

It was Tyler who led and dictated at every single step. It was he who first raised the issue in his letter to Webster; it was he who ordered Upshur to proceed; and the project was completed and the treaty framed before Calhoun took over the portfolio of State.

And now England has been thwarted. Texas has been conciliated, the treaty has been completed and transmitted to the Senate with a stirring message. And now Henry Clay appears to evoke the specter of party to defeat it, and Van Buren declares against it, and the abolitionists denounce it, and under the lashings of the whip of Clay and through the contriving of Van Buren enough Senators are persuaded to the repudiation of their pledge to defeat the ratification. America through political perfidy and personal ambitions had refused an empire as a gift.

But John Tyler had only begun to fight. The campaign of 1844 was on. With Clay and Polk contending for the Presidency, and neither standing for immediate annexation, John Tyler accepted an independent nomination—and unfurled the flag of Texas. With the certainty that the persistence of his candidacy would sound the knell of Polk, he met the importunities to withdraw with the dictation of his terms. If Polk and the Democrats would take the banner of Texas from his hands and bear it openly into the fight and keep the faith, he would retire. The pledge was made, the pledge was kept, and thus the treaty was ratified in the closing hours of Tyler's administration; and the annexation of Texas was an accomplished fact. Thus, the monument to the administration of Tyler is a vast empire brought beneath the flag—Texas is his monument!

When he laid down the burdens of the Presidency, John Tyler could review it with pride in his achievements and in the fidelity with which he had clung to all the fundamentals of his faith. The astonishing vulgarity of his foes had not even tempted him to part company with his gentility. If he had broken with his party it was because his party had chosen the path of perfidy

Pinckney, of South Carolina, which gave the antislavery men a pretext for agitation under the guise of the sanctity of the right of petition.

4. As the first Vice President to succeed to the Executive authority, he rendered an immeasurable service by firmly asserting his right and authority as President of the United States, thus permanently settling the tenure of all the Vice Presidents that have subsequently succeeded to the first office by the death of the President.

5. As "Veto President" he destroyed for all time the gigantic monopoly of the United States Bank, and as a substitute he evolved his "exchequer system" of finance, pronounced by Webster at Faneuil Hall as "the most beneficial institution, the Constitution alone excepted." This incomparable measure was defeated by a partisan Congress, and the money of the country remained in Tyler's keeping during his whole term without any loss to the Government; and in his management of the public expenditures the same great authority (Webster) declared that "he was remarkably cautious, exact, and particular." He reduced the debt that came to him and administered the government at one fourth less expense than his predecessor, Mr. Van Buren.

6. The Seminole War, that 7 years of fighting had failed to end, by his tact and promptness President Tyler finished in a few months.

7. Dorr's Rebellion, which he dissipated simply by the firmness of his attitude, without firing a gun and without a wound to the Constitution. Daniel Webster wrote, "Your conduct of the affair will hereafter appear, I am sure, worthy of all praise."

8. The Treaty of Washington, 1842, which stands out as one of the most important treaties ever negotiated by the United States, because of the numerous important questions involved—the controversy over the northeastern boundary which had come down unsolved through six administrations, the right of search claimed by Great Britain under pretext of suppressing the slave trade, and the sanctity of territory and protection of the flag involved in the cases of the *Caroline* and *Creole*. In this negotiation, if the immediate labor devolved upon the Secretary of State, Daniel Webster, the constant supervision and direction, as well as final sanction, devolved upon the President. His suggestions and advice were frequently of the most important character, and but for him the English ambassador, Lord Ashburton, would have gone away leaving almost the certainty of a war, in which England would have had the assistance of both France and Mexico.

9. The Annexation of Texas, during the course of which President Tyler stood forth as the champion of the Monroe Doctrine against the active intrigues of Great Britain and France.

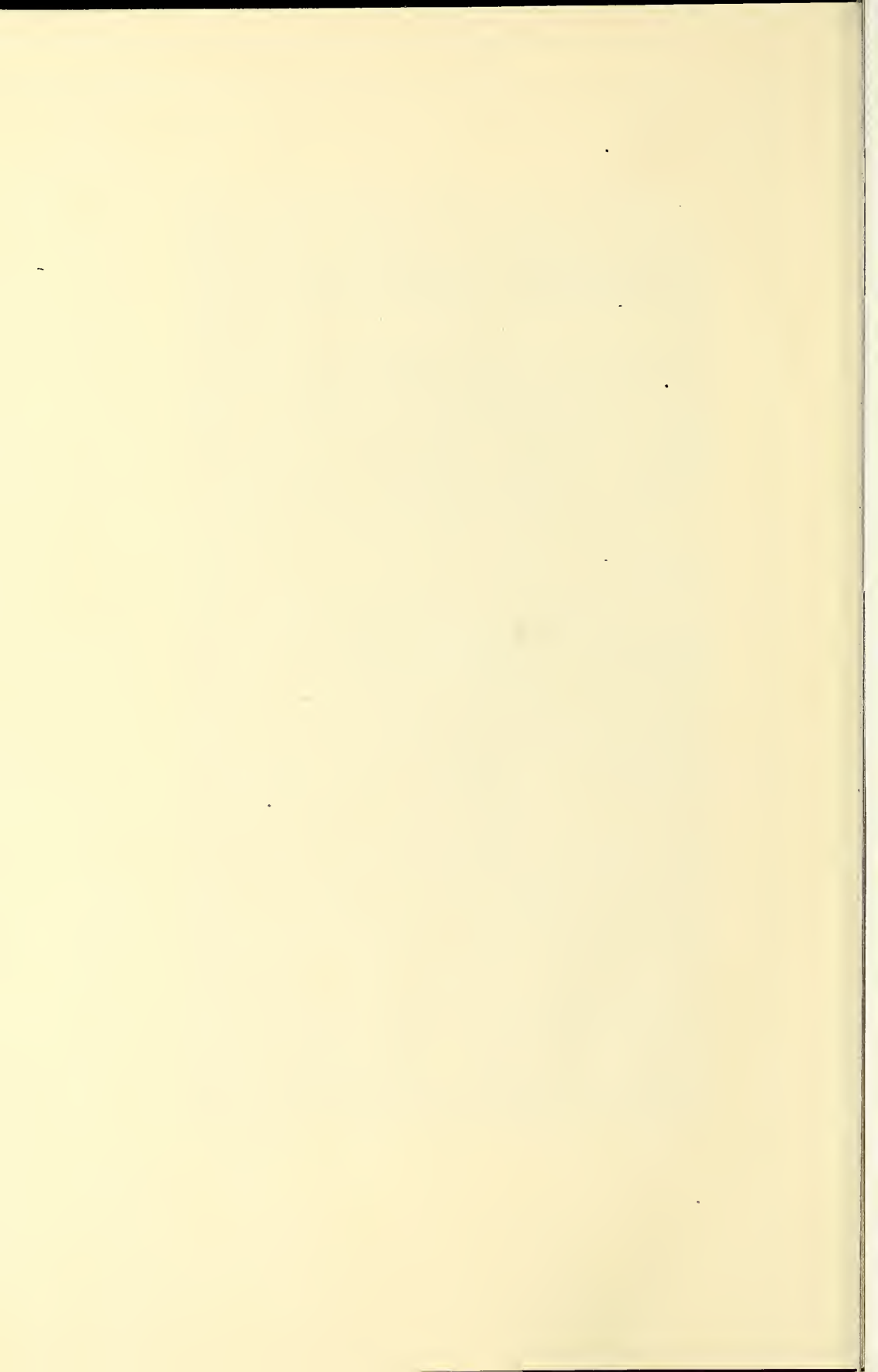
10. Hawaiian Islands. These islands were seized by the British fleet in 1842, but President Tyler protested against the seizure as a violation of the Monroe Doctrine. The British force was withdrawn, and by the precedent created these islands became eventually a part of the United States during the Presidency of William McKinley.

11. By the treaty with China, negotiated through Caleb Cushing, of Massachusetts, in 1844, he was the first President to throw open the doors of the Orient to the people of the United States.

12. As the advocate of peace in 1861 we see him sent by Virginia to President Buchanan to prevent any hasty measure. We see him originating the peace convention, of which he was president, and firmly supporting the Crittenden compromise, which, if adopted, would have prevented any war.

Happily for himself he was spared the pathos of the struggle of the South for self-government and the intolerable persecution of his people that followed the conclusion of the war.







# Lincoln Lore

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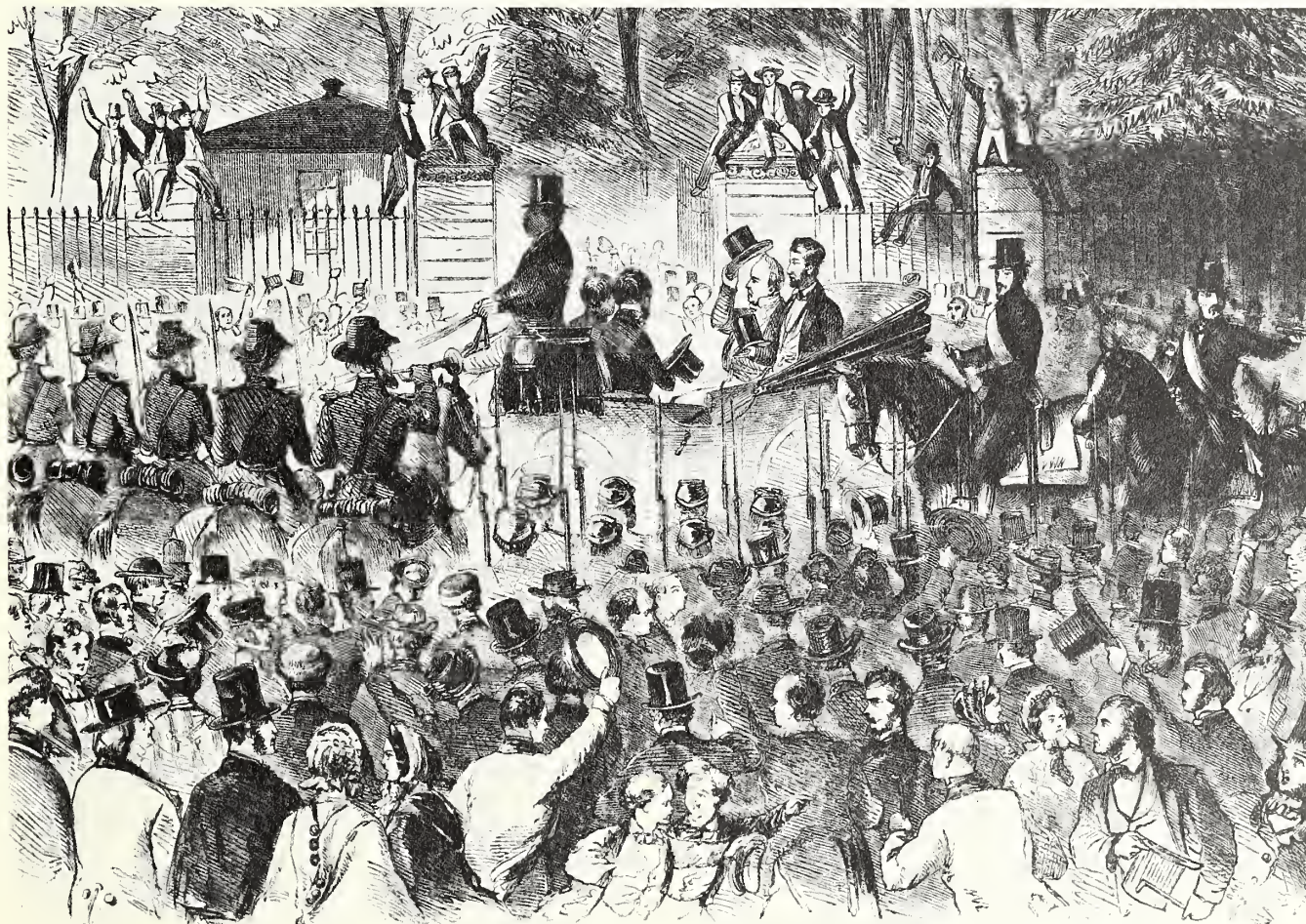
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## FIVE EX-PRESIDENTS WATCHED THE LINCOLN ADMINISTRATION

Presidents who retire from office are expected to become "elder statesmen." Former President Richard M. Nixon seems currently to be bidding for that status by promising to speak occasionally "in non-political forums." He will stress foreign policy, he says, because partisanship is supposed to end at America's shores. He promises to be above the partisan battles of the day; he will become an elder statesman.

In Lincoln's day, Presidents who left office did not automatically assume the status of elder statesmen. The five surviving ex-Presidents in 1861 — Martin Van Buren, John Tyler,

Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, and James Buchanan — did have enough reputation for being above the party battles for it to be suggested more than once that they meet to find remedies for the secession crisis. That such a meeting never took place is eloquent testimony to the weakness of the non-partisan ideal in the nineteenth century. The broad public did not regard these men — and the ex-Presidents did not regard each other — as passionless Nestors well on their way to becoming marble statues. They proved, in fact, to be fiercely partisan.



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

**FIGURE 1.** Lincoln met two former Presidents shortly before his inauguration in 1861. Millard Fillmore greeted him in Buffalo, New York, and he met the incumbent, James Buchanan, twice in Washington. Reporters indicated that in both cases Lincoln chatted amiably, but no one knows the subjects of their conversations.

It was an irony that John Tyler came nearest to assuming an official status as a nonpartisan adjudicator in a conference meant to reconcile the sections, for he would later demonstrate the greatest partisan difference from the Lincoln administration of any of the former Presidents. By November of 1860, Tyler already thought it too late for a convocation of representatives of all the states to arrive at a compromise settlement which would save the Union. He did recommend a meeting of "border states" which would bear the brunt of any sectional war in the event a compromise was not reached. New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri could at least arrange a peaceful separation of the South if they could not keep the Union together. Tyler's proposal never bore fruit, but, when the Virginia General Assembly proposed a peace conference of all states in Washington for February, 1861, Tyler became one of Virginia's five commissioners at the convention. The delegates in Washington elected Tyler president of the conference unanimously, but the convention was so divided in voting on recommendations that it was largely ignored by Congress. Tyler returned to Virginia and became an advocate of secession. When urged to lead a compromise movement after the fall of Fort Sumter in the spring, Tyler thought it hopeless. Lincoln, he said, "having weighed in the scales the value of a mere local Fort against the value of the Union itself" had brought on "the very collision he well knew would arise whenever Fort Sumter was attempted to be reinforced or provisioned." In November, Tyler was elected to serve in the Confederate House of Representatives. Far from becoming an elder statesman, John Tyler played a role in destroying the nation which had once elected him Vice-President.

Millard Fillmore despised Republicans as threats to the Union he loved and had once helped to preserve (by supporting the Compromise of 1850). In the secession crisis, he felt that the burden lay upon Republicans to give "some assurance . . . that they, . . . are ready and willing to . . . repeal all unconstitutional state laws; live up to the compromises of the Constitution, and . . . treat our Southern brethren as friends." Nevertheless, he disagreed with the cautious policy of lame-duck President James Buchanan, who felt that the government had no authority to "coerce a state." The men who passed ordinances of secession, Fillmore argued, should be "regarded as an unauthorized assembly of men conspiring to commit treason, and as such liable to be punished like any other unlawful assembly engaged in the same business."

Though no one knows how Fillmore voted in 1860, it is doubtful that he voted for Lincoln. It seemed awkward, there-

fore, when Fillmore was Lincoln's official host during his stay in Buffalo, New York, on the way to Washington for the inaugural ceremonies. Fillmore took him to the First Unitarian Church in the morning and at night to a meeting in behalf of Indians, but no one knows what they talked about.

When war broke out in April, Fillmore rallied quickly to the colors. Four days after the fall of Fort Sumter, the ex-President was speaking to a mass Union rally in Buffalo, saying that it was "no time now to inquire by whose fault or folly this state of things has been produced;" it was time for "every man to stand to his post, and . . . let posterity . . . find our skeleton and armor on the spot where duty required us to stand." He gave five hundred dollars for the support of families of volunteers and soon organized the Union Continentals, a company of men too old to fight. Enrolling Buffalo's older men of sub-

stance in the Union cause, the Continentals dressed in colorful uniforms, provided escorts for ceremonial and patriotic occasions, and provided leverage for procuring donations for the Union cause. Fearing British invasion through Canada to aid the Confederacy, Fillmore hounded the government to provide arms and men to protect the Niagara frontier.

Suddenly in February of 1864, Fillmore performed an abrupt about-face. In the opening address for the Great Central Fair of the Ladies Christian Commission in Buffalo, Fillmore rehearsed a catalogue of war-induced suffering and announced that "lasting peace" would come only when much was "forgiven, if not forgotten." When the war ended, the United States should restore the South "to all their rights under the Constitution." Republicans were outraged. The ex-President had turned a nonpartisan patriotic rally into a veiled criticism of the administration's conduct of the war.

Personally, Fillmore felt that the country was "on the verge of ruin." Without a change in the administration, he said, "we must soon end in national bankruptcy and military despotism." The ex-President, once a Whig and a Know-Nothing, endorsed Democrat George B. McClellan for the Presidency in 1864.

After Lincoln's assassination, Fillmore led the delegation which met the President's funeral train and escorted it to Buffalo. This did not expunge from Republican's memories Fillmore's partisan acts of 1864. Nor did it cool his dislike of Republicans. In 1869, he stated that it would be "a blessing to break the ranks of the corrupt proscription radical party, that now curses the country. Could moderate men of both parties unite in forming a new one . . . it would be well."

Among the five living ex-Presidents, none was more hostile to President Lincoln than Franklin Pierce. In 1860, he hoped



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

FIGURE 2. Millard Fillmore.

that a united Democratic party would choose Southern candidate John C. Breckinridge. The New Hampshire Democrats endorsed Stephen A. Douglas instead, but Pierce went along with the decision, though without enthusiasm. Lincoln's election was, for this Democratic ex-President, a "distinct and unequivocal denial of the coequal rights" of the states. In a letter written on Christmas Eve, 1861, Pierce urged the South to delay action for six months. If the North did not right the wrongs done the South, then she could depart in peace.

It was hoped that all of the ex-Presidents might attend John Tyler's Washington Peace Conference. Pierce declined, saying that "the North have been the first wrong doers and [he had] never been able to see how a successful appeal could be made to the south without first placing [the North] right." After news of Fort Sumter's fall, however, he reconsidered and wrote ex-President Martin Van Buren, suggesting that Van Buren assemble the former Presidents in Philadelphia to resolve the crisis. He spoke in Concord, New Hampshire, urging the citizens "to stand together and uphold the flag." Van Buren declined to call the former Presidents together and suggested that Pierce himself should. The wind went out of the sails of the idea of an ex-Presidents' peace convention.

Soon, Pierce lost his enthusiasm for the war effort. He made a trip in the summer of 1861 to Michigan and Kentucky to visit old political friends. On Christmas Eve, he received a letter from Secretary of State William H. Seward, then in charge of the administration's political arrests, enclosing a letter from an anonymous source which accused Pierce of making his trip to promote membership in the Knights of the Golden Circle, "a secret league" whose object was "to overthrow the Government." Seward unceremoniously demanded an explanation from the former President of the United States. Pierce indignantly denied the charge, Seward quickly apologized, and it was soon discovered that Seward had fallen for a hoax. An opponent of the Republicans had written the letter to show how far the Republicans would go in their policy of crying "treason" at the slightest provocation.

Pierce sank into despair. He loathed the proscription of civil liberties in the North, detested emancipation, and saw the Lincoln administration as a despotic reign. The killing of white men for the sake of freeing black men was beyond his comprehension. He thought Lincoln a man of "limited ability and narrow intelligence" who was the mere tool of the abolitionists. He stopped short of endorsing the Southern cause. Old friends avoided him, but Pierce swore never to "justify, sustain, or in any way or to any extent uphold this cruel, heartless, aimless unnecessary war."

At a rally in Concord on July 4, 1863, Pierce courted martyrdom. "True it is," he said, "that I may be the next victim of unconstitutional, arbitrary, irresponsible power." He called efforts to maintain the Union by force of arms "futile" and said that only through "peaceful agencies" could it be saved. Pamphlets compared Pierce to Benedict Arnold, but he persisted and urged the Democratic party to adopt a platform in 1864 calling for restoring the Union by ceasing to fight. Republicans did not forget his actions. New Hampshire provided no public recognition of her son's public career for fifty years after the war.

Martin Van Buren, alone among the ex-Presidents, gave the Lincoln administration unwavering support. He refused Pierce's invitation to organize a meeting of ex-Presidents out of a desire not to be associated with James Buchanan, whose course during the secession crisis Van Buren despised. He had confidence in Lincoln, based probably on information he received from the Blair family, Montgomery Blair being a Republican and a member of Lincoln's cabinet.

There was no more interesting course pursued by an ex-President than James Buchanan's. He had more reason than any other to feel directly antagonistic to the Lincoln administration. Like Pierce, Buchanan had been accused by Lincoln in 1858 of conspiring with Stephen A. Douglas and Roger B. Taney to nationalize slavery in the United States. As Lincoln's immediate predecessor in the office, Buchanan had succeeded in his goal of avoiding war with the South until the new administration came in. The price of this success was the popular imputation of blame on the weak and vacillating course of the Buchanan administration for not nipping seces-

sion in the bud. It was commonly asserted that Buchanan conspired with secessionists to let the South out of the Union. Lincoln's Vice-President Hannibal Hamlin, for example, felt that the Buchanan administration "connives at acts of treason at the South." Despite the findings of a Congressional investigation, many persisted in the belief that the administration had allowed a disproportionate share of arms to flow to Southern arsenals and a dangerously large amount of money to remain in Southern mints. When war broke out, feelings were so strong against Buchanan that he required a guard from the local Masonic Lodge in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to protect his home, Wheatland, from vandalism and himself from personal injury. President Lincoln did not help Buchanan's plight when, in his message of July 4, 1861, he charged that he found the following upon entering office: a "disproportionate share, of the Federal muskets and rifles" in Southern armories, money in Southern mints, the "Navy . . . scattered in distant seas," and Fort Pickens incapable of reinforcement because of "some *quasi* armistice of the late administration."

Such charges rankled Buchanan, and he spent much of the war years in a careful but quiet attempt to amass documentation which would refute the charges. By late 1862, he had written a book which accomplished this task (to his satisfaction, at least), but he delayed publication until 1866 "to avoid the possible imputation . . . that any portion of it was intended to embarrass Mr. Lincoln's administration." Buchanan's friend Jeremiah Black had doubted that Buchanan could defend his own administration without attacking Lincoln's:

It is vain to think that the two administrations can be made consistent. The fire upon the Star of the West was as bad as the fire on Fort Sumter; and the taking of Fort Moultrie & Pinckney was worse than either. If this war is right and politic and wise and constitutional, I cannot but think you ought to have made it.

Despite the many reasons for which Buchanan might have opposed the Lincoln administration, the ex-President did not. As far as he was concerned, the seceding states "chose to commence civil war, & Mr. Lincoln had no alternative but to defend the country against dismemberment. I certainly should have done the same thing had they begun the war in my time, & this they well knew." Buchanan did not think the war unconstitutional, and he repeatedly told Democrats that it was futile to demand peace proposals. He also supported the draft.

Buchanan considered it too late in 1864 for the Democrats to argue that Lincoln had changed the war's aims. He was pleased to see that McClellan, the Democratic candidate, thought so too. Lincoln's victory in the election, which Buchanan equated with the dubious honor of winning an elephant, caused Buchanan to think that the President should give a "frank and manly offer to the Confederates that they might return to the Union just as they were before." The ex-President's political views were as clearly nostalgic and indifferent to emancipation as those of any Democrat, but he was not among those Democrats who criticized the war or the measures Lincoln used to fight it.

Buchanan spoke of Lincoln in complimentary language. He thought him "a man of honest heart & true manly feelings." Lincoln was "patriotic," and Buchanan deemed his assassination "a terrible misfortune." The two men had met twice when Lincoln came to Washington to assume the Presidency, and Buchanan recalled the meetings fondly, remembering Lincoln's "kindly and benevolent heart and . . . plain, sincere and frank manners." When the Lincoln funeral train passed through Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Buchanan watched it from his buggy.

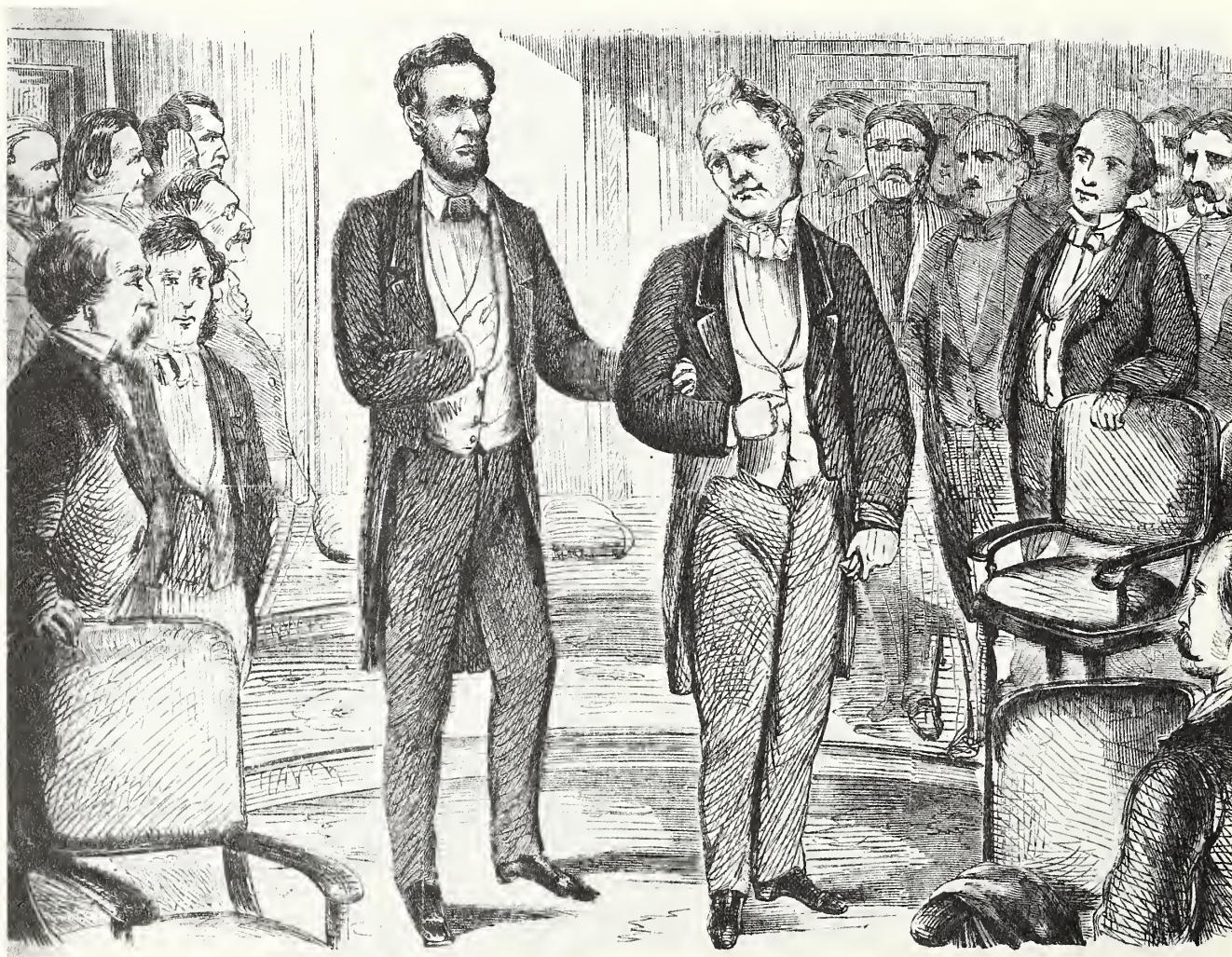
The ex-Presidents benefitted from the Revisionism of historians like James G. Randall. It was their work which rectified the generations-old charge that Buchanan trifled with treason. In some cases, however, this has been a distorting force. Randall's *Lincoln the President: Midstream* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1952) gives the reader an extremely sympathetic portrait of Franklin Pierce in keeping with Randall's view that most Democrats more truly represented Lincoln's views than his fellow Republicans. Thus Pierce appears as the victim of Seward's misguided zeal in the affair of the Knights of

the Golden Circle hoax and, in a particularly touching moment, as the friendly consoler of a bereaved father in the White House. In a horrible train accident immediately before entering the Presidency, Pierce and his wife had witnessed the death of their young son mangled in the wreckage of their car. Therefore, when Willie Lincoln died in 1862, ex-President Pierce sent a letter offering condolences. This is all one learns of Franklin Pierce in Randall's volumes on Lincoln's administration. It is useful to know of his partisan opposition to Lincoln and the war as well, and it in no way detracts from the magnanimity of his letter of condolence. If anything, it serves to highlight the personal depth of feeling Pierce must have felt for the Lincolns in their time of personal bereavement; it allows us even better to appreciate him as a man as well as a politician.

It is easy to forget that Presidents are men. This look at the ex-Presidents of Lincoln's day is a reminder that these men retained their personal and partisan views of the world. It would be hard to imagine an ex-President's club. Van Buren would have nothing to do with Buchanan, though both had been Democrats. Van Buren took the popular view that Buchanan was a "doughface" who truckled to the South instead of standing up to it as Andrew Jackson had done during the Nullification crisis. John Tyler remained a Virginian at heart and cast his fortunes with secession and against the country of which he had been President. Franklin Pierce and Millard Fillmore, the one a Democrat and the other a Whig in their prime,

retained a dislike of the Republican party. Fillmore supported the war with vigor but came to despair of the effort through suspicion that the Republican administration mishandled it. Pierce always blamed the war on Republican provocation and came quickly, and not without some provocation from the administration, to oppose the war effort bitterly. Ironically, James Buchanan, who labored under the heaviest burden of charges of Southern sympathies, was the least critical of the administration of any of the ex-Presidents except Martin Van Buren. Critical of Republican war aims like the rest, Buchanan, nevertheless, supported the war effort and maintained a high personal regard for his Presidential successor. Buchanan thus approached the twentieth-century ideal of an elder statesman.

*Editor's Note:* The Presidents of Lincoln's era have been rather well served by their biographers. Two splendid examples are Roy F. Nichols's *Franklin Pierce: Young Hickory of the Granite Hills* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1958) and Philip Shriver Klein's *President James Buchanan: A Biography* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962). Robert J. Rayback's *Millard Fillmore: Biography of a President* (Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society, 1959) and Robert Seager, II's *And Tyler Too: A Biography of John & Julia Gardiner Tyler* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963) are useful. There is no careful study of Martin Van Buren's later life. The sketches of these Presidents here are based on these volumes.



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 3. Lincoln and Buchanan did not meet again after this day.

## **President Tyler had the most kids**

*From Knight-Ridder Newspapers*

**Q.** What president had the most children?

**A.** John Tyler, who was president of the United States from 1841 to 1845, married Letitia Christian on his 23rd birthday. He and Letitia had eight children. After Letitia died, Tyler married Julia Gardiner, and they had seven children. That's the record — 15! But William Henry Harrison (president for one month only) and Anna Symmes had six daughters and four sons. Their grandson, Benjamin Harrison, became the 23rd president. Rutherford B. Hayes and Lucy Ware Webb, the first college-educated first lady, had seven sons and one daughter. Three of their children died in infancy. James Garfield and his wife, Lucretia Rudolph, had five sons and two daughters, but two died in infancy. Thomas Jefferson and Martha Wayles Skelton had six children, but only two made it to adulthood. Zachary Taylor and Margaret Mackall Smith had six children as well. Two died as infants. John Adams and Abigail Smith had three sons and two daughters.





